

The Death of a Young Tree

A man placed a young tree in a coffin.

It got sick and died.

Too bad, said his mother.

Yes, I was watching it. I saw it getting quite ill. I thought it was merely a passing nausea. A simple vomit and the system rights itself.

Too bad, said his mother.

So I saw it getting really awful sick; so I ran down to the coffin maker and said there's something awful sick. He said it was my head. I said no, my head's fine, thank you. I said, I really need a coffin in a hurry. And so he gave me this one, said the man.

When father got home father said, you did right in principle. But you did wrong in practice. Not that your intentions were wrong; but the act is in very poor taste. Not that you did not mean well; however, you have created a very unfortunate situation. First, my dear son, you cannot bury something made of wood in another thing made of wood; this is burying the dead child in its mother, so to speak; and might cause a very serious infection; if not here, certainly in heaven. There is something desperately wrong. Secondly, my dear son, you have run up a bill at the coffin maker's; which can only be paid from the money set aside for my own personal coffin; which I shall need at such time when I seek that certain privacy now enjoyed by this young tree. You have unclothed your father, so to speak, to clothe a stranger. Not that I do not applaud the act that clothes the naked, (it has even certain sexual morality to it); it bespeaks the kind heart that bears not easily the need of other's. However, in so doing you have given treasure to the stranger, and so robbed the nest; this may over-ride all those things which I cannot help, in my pride, applauding and cheering in you. What do you say, my dear wife and mother of my only son?

Too bad, she said.

Too bad? Too bad what?, cried the father.

That a tree so young is dead, she said.

— Russell Edson

Stamford, Conn.